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ABSTRACT

Although lesson planning is stressed in teacher training programs as a skill essential to effective teaching, the literature shows low correlation between teacher planning procedures and subsequent classroom efficiency. There exist major discrepancies among definitions of how to devise a comprehensive lesson plan, assumptions on what classroom results a lesson plan should produce, and assumptions on the importance of planning. Although most teachers appear to agree that objectives are important in the planning process, there is disagreement in the definition and the writing of these objectives. Because of spontaneous classroom events, teachers appear to prefer more loosely structured lesson plans, as opposed to what they were taught in methods courses. A lesson plan should be viewed as an aid or an option rather than as a necessity that must be strictly adhered to. (JD)

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TEACHERS' LESSON PLANS: THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

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ABSTRACT:

Though lesson planning is stressed in teacher training programs as a skill essential to effective teaching, the literature shows low correlation between teacher planning procedures and subsequent classroom efficiency. There exist major difficulties attending definitions, assumptions, and applications which may explain the apparent discrepancy. The following is a discussion of some of those difficulties.

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"The present divorce between scholarship and method is as harmful upon one side as upon the other - as detrimental to the best interests of higher academic instruction as it is to the training of teachers."

John Dewey
The Relation of Theory To Practice In Education - Monograph 1904

I. INTRODUCTION:

For many years, lesson planning has been stressed in teacher training programs as a skill essential for effective teaching. Although in recent years a goodly number of studies have been conducted in an effort to determine the impact of lesson planning upon classroom teaching and consequently pupil outcome, a sparsity of such literature still exists. The divorce between scholarship and method to which John Dewey referred is no less true today then it was at the time of his observation. The gap between teacher training programs and the planning procedures teachers utilize once in the classroom is an area in which this is most readily evidenced.

Current research on the relationship between teacher planning procedures and classroom efficiency has indicated a low correlation. (Eisner 1967, Conklin 1977, and Peterson, Marx, and Clark 1978).

A survey administered to Chicago Board of Education Teachers (Bernstein 1980) indicated a significant number of teachers in the sample were plagued by the difficulties encountered in efforts to implement daily lesson plans; written plans being something teachers were required to submit for administrative approval weekly. Initially the problems encountered are interpreted to be the result of inexperience on the part of teachers. Hours are spent weekly writing plans in an effort to comply with administrative requirements. Gradually, teachers begin to write out two sets of plans - one for actual use in outline format, a second are to be submitted to the principal. The first set of plans were comprised of several ideas of what might be done in the various subject areas based upon how well the class was progressing. The other set was presented in "perfect" format, that which is taught in teacher education programs,

and expected by school administrators - complete with behavioral objectives (stating "The children will...",) instructional procedures, and methods for evaluation. Interviews with teachers concerning this topic revealed that they generally completed written plans more as a matter of administrative requirement than due to the possible benefits which might result. Furthermore, some teachers stated that plans written out for administrative approval were different from those which they actually incorporated in classroom teaching. (1,32)

It is my intention, within the text of this paper, to discuss some of the major difficulties attending definitions, assumptions, and applications which may clarify the discrepancy between teacher planning procedures and subsequent classroom efficiency.

II. DISCUSSION:

Traditionally, lesson planning has been viewed as a means of helping the classroom teacher in several ways crucial to classroom efficiency; assessment of students' needs, development and implementation of objectives, and organization of instruction. (Taba, Draper, Bobbit, and others) What such curriculum specialists had in common was keen insight into how and why these approaches should be taken. One cannot help but wonder if such things can be implemented in the reality of today's classrooms. Much of the current literature instructing would-be-teachers on procedures of lesson planning seems to be an "updated" version of earlier theory and dependent upon the traditional classroom for success. An interesting point presented by Charles Silberman indicates a possible reason for such dependence.

> "...The traditional classroom is organized on the assumption that the teacher is the source of all knowledge, and that learning is something the teacher makes happen to the student. Many teachers fear that admitting ignorance may diminish their authority."
>
> (9,261)

Similarly, it might follow that teachers fear admitting an inability to adhere to lesson plans may diminish their authority; furthermore, it may cause them to appear out of control or perhaps incompetent in the eyes of administrators.

The ultimate intent of lesson planning is not merely subsequent classroom effeciency, but rather a resultant increase in pupil progress. The question posed by researchers in the area - "Does the use of the lesson plan necessarily improve teaching efficiency and consequently pupil progress?" - has revealed some interesting facts. Available research addressing this issue has indicated a low correlation between lesson plans and pupil progress. A recent study conducted by Peterson, Marx, and Clark (1978) noted that experience, rather than planning, was the most crucial factor in both teahcer efficiency and pupil outcome. There appears to be a general negative attitude concerning the requirement of written lesson plans on the part of teachers. (1,32) Philip Jackson, in his observations of teachers, cites one such possible cause.

> "The swiftness and unpredictability of classroom phenomena help justify the teacher's dependence on intuition in guiding him over the pedagogical rough spots. These same qualities also partially explain why many teachers are impatient with supervisors and others who would have them draw up detailed plans of exactly what they intend to do. It is not laziness that leads to this resistence (though that may be present in individual cases), but the knowledge that such plans are almost bound to go awry ten minutes after the lesson begins." (5,41)

In attempting to discuss the existent situation, it seems that difficulties are most prevalent in three areas related to lesson planning; a) definitions, b) assumptions and c) application or utilization of plans. Definitions dealing with the planning process presents one of the greatest difficulties in the process. Most teacher training classes and materials proved a "how-to" approach. This brings to mind a rather bitter remark made by Silberman which reflects a prevalent attitude toward teaching teachers to plan. He curtly wrote, "What is wrong with teacher education, in short, is less that too much time is devoted to

'how to' courses than that 'how to' courses do not teach anyone how to do anything." (9,444) The type of course criticized by Mr. Silberman often presents a cook-book methodology while failing to clarify the definitions as well as terminology. For instance, most teacher education materials emphasize that the teacher must first determine the objective or goal of the lesson, i.e., determine the ways in which the children will benefit from or be changed by the particular lesson, then formulate those objectives into behavioral terms. The definition of "behavioral terms" is not readily agreed upon. In reviewing literature pertaining to educational and behavioral objectives, it is interesting to note that inumerable volumes have been written not only defining what these objectives are but also identifying the "best" way in which to present them. It is somewhat ironic to note that the definitions are as numerous as the literature. Each specialist in this field is confident that his methods or instructions constitute the only best approach. A basic assumption made in the field of education is that educators, by mere virtue of their titles, are cognizant of what a behavioral objective is.

While a great deal of dissagreement exists concerning ways in which objectives should be written and what they must include, most sources are in agreement concerning the importance of objectives in the lesson planning process. Dressel has observed that teachers exhibit much resistence to writing objectives. His conclusion is that,

> "Despite the need for formulating objectives, doing so often meets with great resistence (due to several inherent difficulties). The difficulties include confused terminology, basic philosophical differences in regard to the nature and role of education, difficulties in translating global concerns into realistic objectives, and skepticism over the usefulness of stating objectives."
>
> (2,27)

Current studies support the notion that teacher planning procedures differ greatly from the suggested approaches. Johnston and Wilson have found a major difficulty lies in the individual's conception

of what, specifically, is involved in the planning process. They concluded that the differences were frequently a result of individual value orientations of teachers which in turn affected their conceptions about planning. However, there exists no standardized approach for minimizing those differences through training, such as in-service work shops. One study, for instance, found that the amount of instruction teachers received regarding lesson planning varied greatly from school to school as did the emphasis upon the importance of writing out lesson plans. (1,32) Apparently, variations in emphasis and importance attributed to planning were related to differences in the value orientation of administrators as well.

Johnston and Wilson have termed this the "normative base" in planning procedures. They further state that,

> "The normative bases for planning refer to the value orientation which leands substance or content to planning. The planner's normative base affects the scope and depth of what is being planned. Moreover, planning may become a routine and routinizing appendage of an organization."
>
> (7,134)

Variances in teachers' conceptions of planning was a difficulty also stated in the unpublished dissertation by Jeffery Smith. From his interviews with teachers, Smith found that teachers viewed planning in terms of getting their classes organized, i.e., started in their books and programs such as basal readers or mathematical series. From second interviews, findings revealed that five out of the seven teachers interviewed claimed they did not really plan their teaching at all, yet all of the interviewees could discuss, with considerable detail, the types of things they wanted to do in the coming weeks. (10)

Some further difficulties include the question of quality (in other words- what constitutes a good lesson plan?) and the issue of purpose. Theoretically, what is frequently seen as a "good" or high quality lesson plan by academicians and administrators may be of little value in the classroom. Utility then, might be considered a crucial requisite for the written lesson plan. The purpose of the plan - efficiency - is directly related to utility. If, in considering utility and efficiency, we draw upon Getzels' definition of efficiency, it is not surprising that so many difficulties are inherent not only in the process of lesson planning,

but in it theory as well. Getzels has defined efficiency as,

> "...a relationship between needs and behavior. When behavior conforms to the needs dimension, it appears 'material', even pleasurable, and is forthcoming with a minimum of strain or expenditure of psychic energy. In this sense, the behavior is efficient." (4,433)

It is doubtful that more than a handful of teachers actually find lesson planning pleasurable. In fact, it would seem planning is particularly demanding of a teacher's psychic energy.

A major assumption inherent in the lesson plan theory is that a plan can actually be implemented in the teaching situation. For this to hold true theorists must also assume that the teacher has total control of the class at all times and is able to predict the events of the day. In essence, it must be assumed that things will go as planned and the environment of the classroom will be conducive to the teacher's implementing what has been written. Unfortunately, anyone who has taught any subject and grade level for any amount of time will admit these assumptions are definitely a far cry from the reality of classroom life. Silberman criticizes teacher training programs for failing to take this reality into account. His complaint seems valid when we consider how very much schools have changed, yet how very little the format and emphasis upon planning has.

> "...The content and procedures of teacher education frequently have no demonstrable relevance to the actual teaching task. One reason they have no relevance is that many educationists are as far removed from the public schools as they are from the arts and sciences faculties. ..Educationists have been so removed from the schools - so uninformed about what life in the classroom is really like - that they have also failed to prepare their students for the schools as they now are." (9,445)

It is difficult to conceive of a teaching situation in which a lesson plan - one written according to the specified procedures - can be implemented where human behavior and interactions can neither be predicted nor controlled. The fact remains that the lesson plan is often seen as exerting inhibiting and constraining effects upon the spontaniety of the classroom

setting. This is not to say that the lesson plan is of no value. If it is to be of any value in a utilitarian sense perhaps some changes must be made commensurate with the changes which have transpired in the schools. Possibly a plan could be of benefit if it is seen as just that - a plan - something which is a suggested approach. This is opposed to the concept of a teacher's plan- a detailed, itemized account of what will and should occur during the course of the school day in addition to the observable ways in which the children will be changed. The mere logistics of how this is to be achieved for twenty to thirty children is, in and of itself, mind boggling!

A less structured plan might offer a more realistic guide from which a teacher might draw throughout the course of a lesson. In the event that situations developed which were not anticipated, a more loosely developed outline could be altered and adapted to the situation. The traditional plan must be carried out in entirely for the objectives to be fully realized. Flexibility is the quality necessary to extract the most value from even the most unexpected occurances. The ability to flow with given events, however, does not necessarily mean to abandon the intentions one had of what types of things should be taught in a given lesson. In some respects the formalized lesson plan is viewed as rigid, inflexible. It is not surprising that so many teachers express disdain, particularly in schools where they are an administrative requirement. (Silberman, Jackson, Bernstein)

Most revealing is a statement made by a teacher interviewed by Philip Jackson concerning the issue of lesson plans in Life In Classrooms. Jackson noted that there are "two sources of uneasiness embedded in (teacher) complaints. One is the fear that spontaneity of the classroom would be destroyed by too many constraints; the other is the hurt created by an implied insult to the teacher's professional pride." These two concerns are both presented by one of the teachers Jackson interviewed. Perhaps a majority of educators share these feelings for it has been my experience that they do. Her comments seem quite significant.

> "I think that it's important that a teacher is respected for her own ideas about teaching and isn't told how to do it. I personally wouldn't like to be handed a curriculum guide and told 'follow it'. I like to do what I want when I want to do it. I have friends in other systems who have to turn in lesson plans a week or a month in advance. To me this is silly, because you don't teach that way. If something interesting comes up, a butterfly flies in the window, we talk about butterflies. I do make a lesson plan out every week and Monday morning stick to it from nine to ten, but by ten o'clock I'm usually off of it. I have it there for a substitute, or for myself, if I'm really hard up for something to do I can look in my book and see what I (had) planned to do." (6,130)

In larger school systems, principals are routinely required to collect lesson plan books for at least a week in advance. In Chicago public schools, for instance, teachers submit these on Fridays and are not given their pay checks until the plan book is submitted to the office. On Monday mornings books are returned with the principal's initials of them indicating the individual teacher has received the approval of the administrator. Although this is an informal procedure, it has not been challenged. One of the more insulting aspects of such a procedure is that the lesson plan has been used as a means of "checking up" on the teacher. The assumption is that if the teacher has completed written lesson plans, then the job of teaching is being done. (A bit simplistic, indeed!)

In conclusion, there is much to be said for the potential of a lesson plan. If viewed as an aid - something the teacher might fall back on or refer to as an option - the negative features might certainly be deminished. Furthermore, there are more useful tasks on which a teacher's time should be spent then the writing out of lesson plans in order to fullfill administrative requirements. A favorite viewpoint expressed by Eisner concernint and summarizing the issues presented herein is most pertinent. If lesson plans were "really useful tools, teachers would use them. If they do not, perhaps it is not because there is something wrong with the teachers, but because there is something wrong with the theory." (3,250)

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